

# Synopsis 24-1-2018-2

From Media Design: Networked & Lens-Based wiki

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## Notes Steve - Some context

"The early 1960s saw the publication of Eric Havelock's Preface to Plato, Claude Levi-Strauss' The Savage Mind, Marshall McLuhan's The Gutenberg Galaxy and Understanding Media, and Jack Goody and Ian Watt's The Consequences of Literacy (1963). For the most part media theory emerged in the 1960s, arising from debate around the subjects which were central to these books: orality and literacy. All were produced at a time when the waning of print-based media was apparent as the new medium of television was disrupting traditional media. It was also a time when the implications of a new computer-mediated discourse network, ushered in by cybernetics and information theory, was emerging. These publications described a trajectory that will take us to Walter Ong's Orality and Literacy (1988) and Friedrich Kittler's Discourse Networks (198\*) and Gramophone, Film, Typewriter (19\*\*).

## Steve's notes

Orality & Literacy by Walter Ong

In Walter Ong's reading (building on Havelock and others), literacy becomes a technology which renders the previous medial technology (the mnemonic system of orality) inconceivable and opaque to literate culture. This is because once language enters the field of vision in the form of written symbols (which allow the reader to visualise abstract concepts) it is impossible to un-think it or reverse their mediation. For Walter Ong: "Literacy consumes its own antecedents [it] consumes their memory." (15). The literates' relation to language is inextricably associated with its reproducibility in encoded form. Central to structuralists, post/structuralists and cybernetics alike, therefore are various forms of software (the alphabet included) which store, mediate and structure memory. Oral cultures survived millennia without need for such a visual-symbolic translation of natural language and never arrived at the necessity to outsource their memory to external storage systems such as the scroll or codex. (15). ¶ Oral cultures generated patterns, clustering subjects together, cycling rhythmic phrases in mnemonic loops. These technologies fashioned the subjects of orality to an equal degree as their literate counterparts were fashioned by their own technology of memory. For the writers in the early 1960s the cybernetic explanation became the means by which to deal with the issue of orality. "All the [smart] things to be said about computers can be spelled out in Plato's Phaedrus". (in ong?) If the software of the alphabet engendered a crisis in subjectivity, over the centuries the human subject managed to naturalise the code, sublating it and making it equivalent to natural language, engendering an illusion that writing was in some way a direct translation of nature. This ideology of the Romantics led to the veneration of the poet who approached the status of God in his generative, originary powers(Ong).

## Steve's Notes

### The Consequences of Literacy (1963) by Jack Goody and Ian Watt

In *The Consequences of Literacy*, Jack Goody and Ian Watt note that "man as talking animal [is studied] primarily by the anthropologist, and man as talking and writing animal primarily by the sociologist."1 For Goody and Watt history proper begins with writing; "history" as a category of knowledge transmission is produced with and by the mnemonic technology of writing. At the beginning of Goody & Watt's text we have the three elements which bare a relation to Burroughs' argument [in the Electronic revolution - see above] which are worth highlighting:

- a) writing as technology;
- b) writing's relation to orality and
- c) writings relation to memory.

These three figures, given a perverse inflection, would also propel Burroughs' argument in *The Electric Revolution*.

For Goody & Watt natural human language allows for forms of social organisation to be passed down through generations. Although this resonates with Korzybski's notion of "accumulation" Goody & Watt borrow Durkheim's term "intellectual capital". Because writing engenders a fundamentally different relation to symbol and referent wholly different systems of communication and technologies of memory are produced which engenders a different conception of time. In oral cultures "each word is ratified in a succession of concrete situations" 2 The transmission of cultural tradition (cultural memory) in oral societies is regarded as "homeostatic" 3 It is a way in which the past can be folded into the present to achieve social cohesion, it is in this way that "the tribal past is digested into the communal orientation of the present". In literate cultures there is a different relation to the line of time as "literate society can not but enforce a more objective recognition of the distinction between what was and what is."4

## Julia Kul Reading

cybernetics



PREFACE TO PLATO - ERIC HAVELOCK INTRODUCING the growth of the early Greek mind.

[this needs editing, but it raises some interesting issues for us]

Let's assume that history is like putting cultural informations into the collective storage. In Greece before Homer, the cultural book had been stored entirely in oral memory. The ear was the chief organ of communication that at that time had shaped dispersive collective memory (700B.C.) With the development of signs (the written language) it started to move slowly toward the eye dominance. It was a REVOLUTION that completely changed the entire linguistic system: vocabulary and syntax of words and sentences.

The first philosophers were living and speaking in a period which was still adjusting to the condition of a possible future LITERACY. The meaning of particular terms wasn't define historically and it wasn't fixed to any previous semiotic links or areas. Especially the philosophical terminology presented itself rather unstable and blurry. It tended to shift in accordance with different occurring contexts. With each new generation of orators and thinkers it has been undergoing reinterpretation and redefinition. Philosophical investigation wasn't rooted in the language and consequently its outcome (the philosophical thesis) lacked the crucial element; exactness. The lack of shared terminology seemed to be "analytically-creative" yet the fact that it wasn't historically coined made early philosophers strongly oriented toward metaphysical problems and formulate abstract, greatly intuitional solutions by referring to one's own semiotic system.

The alphabet was not an addition to the abilities of the tongue but the factor which started the remodelling process the pre-Platonic oral system into abstract vocabulary. The Pre-socratics themselves were essentially oral prophets linked to the repeatable past and first organisers of new syntax of the future. They were devoted to the task of inventing a language by establishing some precise syntax categories necessary for addressing abstract statements. It was simply the process of building up a grid of pre-coordinates for future thinkers and assigning the particular coordinates (phenomenons) to unchangeable values. This assignation became fundamental to any kind of speculative activity. The terminology that Plato and Aristotle seek to define had to pass a long development period before reaching such a precision. Therefor Aristotle adopted the terminology of many other philosophers before him. The previous thinkers can claim an authority no greater than him.

Problems with intellectual authorship of particular linguistic forms caused the general distortion of oral theories.

## PLATO ON POETRY

The role of poetry in early Greece was fundamental and powerful; it provided moral, spiritual guidelines and intellectual training for citizens. It functioned as a divine book, encyclopaedia containing all possible information, and, what follows, it presented itself as a powerful didactic instrument. Plato rebelled against it since, in his understanding, poetry produced a false version of experience which is twice removed from reality: it is a knowledge produced by a fictitious narration which is afterwards re-enacted it on stage. Poetry's impact on public was oral and not direct: authors never speak themselves, the knowledge was transmitted by actor's reciting the poem. Poetry produces a "double mimesis" by using the empirical realm for purposes of imitation, theatric impersonation and over-dramatisation of everyday communication in fashion of extreme realism. Poetry therefor is dangerous both for morality and science: it is "crippling of the mind",...the psychic poison confusing our intelligence, a prostitute that seduces reasoning, the enemy of TRUTH. It confuses man's values and render him characterless. It creates a potential threat to the decent Greek citizens that should be professional in his social duties. (guardians, workers-food providers.) It should be removed from educational system.



School system was based on the similar oral method opposing the technology of writing till the end of 5.B.C Literacy wasn't popular (Iliad wasn't always available in bookstores) so people could only listen to a performance. The greek oral state of mind was for Plato the main enemy. Why? Because poetry was the only mean to control the verbal, person-to-person transition of information. It was a rhythmic, metric pattern that discreetly invaded the soul of citizens. POETRY WAS A PRESERVED COMMUNICATION; a living memory, a linguistic statement, a paradigm telling people what they are and how should they behave.

Plato's Republic shouldn't be read as utopian and strictly political programme. It is mostly educational proposal. Once Republic is viewed as an attack on the existing educational apparatus of Greece, the logic of its organisation becomes clear. In that respect, it is not the utopian proposal. Plato claimed that instead of over-dramatisation of reality, educational system should provide a clear description of reality. According to Plato that is precisely what philosophy is doing. Who should therefor rule people's hearts and minds? Philosophers or poets?

It was a power struggle between philosophers and poets. Poetry stood in Plato's way to propagate Platonism.

## Reading - Alice

### Cybernetics and Ghosts, by Italo Calvino

#### Synopsis

Italo Calvino begins his essay from 1967 by describing the beginnings of language. Humans in prehistoric times started using speech to describe their daily activities, establish rules for the community, create relationships within and outside their clan. He imagines the archetype of 'the first storyteller' as the creator of complex language, experimenting with combinations of words, associating words with real objects and beings. From a very limited set of notions available to the prehistoric human, a form of language was created by repeating the same sounds and gestures and adapting them to various contexts. Stories began to emerge through various permutations between the limited activities and characters known to humans.

\* A more complex version of these proto-stories is represented by folk stories, which every culture has developed in a desire to explain the world and phenomena that surround them. Russian philologist Vladimir Propp proposed the idea that all folk stories follow the same structure in his work 'Morphology of the Folktale', claiming that 'all such tales were like variants of a single tale, and could be broken down into a number of narrative

\* cybernetics



functions.' This does not mean that international folklore is not incredibly complex, but purely introduces the idea that it is the result of infinite permutations between a finite set of elements passed down through oral history. Claude Levi-Strauss took this idea one step further when working with the folk tales of Brazil, treating these elements through the lens of mathematical processes. The idea that literature can be broken down into functional segments has also been debated within linguistic and literary groups such as Russian formalists, the semiological school of Roland Barthes, as well as Oulipo. The group of French linguists looked at literature as a structure that can be deconstructed into pieces that can be analyzed in relation to the socio-cultural environment in which the work has been created, but also reconstructed almost to infinity by rearranging the pieces.

Since literature can be processed from a mathematical approach, made up of a finite number of elements and their permutations, Calvino starts drawing a connection to computer 'brains' which could potentially do the work of producing literature and be successful at it. He proposes the idea that writers do nothing more than follow the set of rules that they have already tested empirically, which is inevitably based on paths established by previous writers. Writing, in his view, is not a product of divine inspiration, or a talent that cannot be described in terms of logic. This idea dismantles the concept of the author as superior creature gifted with attributes unavailable to the average man. And since the process of writing is no longer idealized, he poses the question of having machines replace poets and authors. This hypothetical machine would be fed information, literature, and produce, in turn, literature. In his view, a perfect literary machine, after being forced to produce classical literature as output, would eventually reprogram itself to produce a much needed human disorder, expressed through avant-garde literature situated at the intersection between culture, language and probability.

In order to further strengthen his arguments, Calvino proposes an opposite view. Literature, instead of conforming to norms of language, is actually striving to free itself from them, in order to express what has previously been hidden, obstructed, concealed. Literature is an expression of the social or individual unconscious. In literary history, every literary current is born from the 'ghosts' of previous conceptions, revealing what was previously hidden, and discovering surprising new concepts in the process, far from our previous ideas of logic and rationality.

The topic of artistic creation as a set of permutations is then developed further, with the example of puns and word-play. Freud seems to have had a particular interest in this area, which only strengthens Calvino's association with the unconscious. The main idea is that word-play is simply a game of combining words in new, unexpected ways, until we reach a funny combination. In this sense, poetry or painting are also the result of countless permutations between words and rhymes, or between colors and brush strokes. Writing, as well, is a process of combining existing syntactical structures and notions, until a deeper meaning can be extracted from the right combination. This meaning could not have been revealed through traditional, rational practices, but is simply a meaning produced by the unconscious. Here, Calvino's two apparently opposing arguments come together to better prove his point. Writing is a game of combinations, a set of rules that is at the base of the work, but the combinations and rules, when arranged in the right order, reveal an unexpected meaning, extracted deep from the unconscious.

### Thesis

The thesis is that a set of rules, rather than divine inspiration is required in order to write. This concept brings a sense of relief to the author, knowing that writing does not rely on something as arbitrary and vague as talent or inspiration. Literature can thus be reduced to a basic structure, and he expresses this concept by saying 'the endless variety of living forms can be reduced to the combination of certain finite quantities'.

### Opinion



I appreciate his view on the creation of literature, which comes from a realistic approach. He demystifies the author as a superior figure and puts forward the idea that literature is simply the result of permutations between elements of structure, a sort of word-play from which an unexpected meaning can be extracted. Thus, literature is a combination of 'cybernetics' in the sense of mathematical permutation, and 'ghosts' which reveal parts of our collective unconscious. I believe this is quite a refreshing position on literature for his time, as a foresight to predictive text bots that can imitate the style of any writer.

Video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP3c1h8v2ZQ>): Kurt Vonnegut, The shapes of stories

## Reading – Alex

### Uncreative Writing – Kenneth Goldsmith

In his book »Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age« published in 2011 Kenneth Goldsmith, poet and author, presents the concept of uncreative writing in order to »update« writing to make it suitable for the 21st century. He is a great advocate of appropriation and teaches his ideas about writing at the University of Pennsylvania.

“The world is full of texts, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more.” But instead of adding more to the world, what Goldsmith proposes to do is to alter and to handle the material that is already there. In his very first sentences you can already recognise his attitude towards plagiarism. Goldsmith presents new techniques and methodologies like appropriation, copy & pasting and remixing to create more literature, always aiming to reinvent the writing of today and broadening the boundaries of language. What has often been ignored by authors, says Goldsmith, are the possibilities and circumstances of the digital world that provides us with a lot of tools allowing us to create, edit and easily distribute text. “Most writing proceeds as if the internet had never happened”. Goldsmith also takes ways of writing »outside the scope of literary practice« into account like: »word processing, databasing, recycling, appropriation, intentional plagiarism, identity ciphering, and intensive programming«. He thinks that, unlike art, modern literature has not put enough effort into implementing these changes into its own practice. This is the reason for his book: opening new doors to new fields of literature.

The book begins with a few examples of uncreative writing, that he examines during the next chapters. By explaining the example of Letham who wrote an essay on plagiarism reassembling only excerpts from other people's work, he points out the current negative view on appropriation. In contradiction to his theory of appropriation plagiarism is mostly not accepted. Although such a work may represent a great piece of art, the academia neglects its creativity which is why they reject it. But even the process of copying something existing can generate creativity — in fact it's impossible to oppress it.

the understanding of what language means. Behind every image there is a code that consists of a new picture. Everything that can be seen on the digital interface. What can



In the first chapter of the book Goldsmith wants to alter the understanding of what language means. Behind every image there is a code that consists of words. We can edit that cryptic language and save it as an image. As a result we end up with a new picture. Everything that can be seen on the digital screen lays on top of a layer of language, a language we should use for writing practice. Goldsmith slowly reveals the text behind this interface. What can changes to the code mean? How does it effect writing? Furthermore, he describes the materiality as crucial to the understanding of text. One also needs to take the whitespace, the position and the colour of a text into consideration for writing practices. This means to draw attention, not to what, but how things can be said. Just like concrete poetry used to do it.

Language is a highly unstable construct. Goldsmith explains this with a simple example: »A red circle«. Everyone has a different notion of what a red circle is. Not only the colour but also the shape as well as the environment may be totally different in everybody's imagination. Things become even more complex when a computer is being asked for a red circle, e.g. via a google search. This again expands the scope of language by including the internet respectively algorithms. The meaning of a text may change at any time and is not stable or fixed at all. It can be reinterpreted, translated or adapted. Later in chapter six Goldsmith returns to this point when talking about LeWitt's work. LeWitt wrote down his art as recipes and let others do the painting for him. When reading the instruction for how the picture should look like the point of flexibility in interpretation of these texts becomes more obvious.

In the following chapters Goldsmith explains why appropriation should be accepted and why it is necessary. He states how it could be used as a writing-tool, saying that a lot of creativity emerges from copying or retyping. This also leads him to the assumption that not the originality or synthetic ability of a writer should be the indicators for the quality of a work, but instead the choice and the taste of the author – how one reassembles existing pieces. He also connects that to pre-digital examples like Walther Benjamin's "The Arcades Project". He continues with examples from the field of visual arts and what writing can learn from it, considering Duchamp with his ready-mades. Goldsmith labels that kind of art as work to be thought about, not to be seen – a statement accompanying the whole book. This is part of his vision for writing, too: It should not just be read but it should make you think.

At the end of the book, Goldsmith turns towards computer-made literature and how computation can help treat massive datasets and how humans already adapted their reading habits to the digital media (whereas the writing practice didn't). His teaching at the university is also part of his explanations and how he enables his students to become creative by forcing them to be as uncreative as possible. He wants his students to become "unoriginal geniuses" and so he motivates anyone to become the latter.

Overall Goldsmith wants to encourage to take a different approach towards writing. He wants to widen the term of writing and the understanding of language. He is doing this by using techniques like appropriation or retyping. Ultimately the book wants to »update« writing and adapt it to the digital post-modern world. This is always accompanied by Goldsmith's radical idea about appropriation.

I think this book is great to open your eyes for what is possible with text and it shows ideas how to create new writings in a digital environment. Goldsmith illustrates his arguments with great examples and references especially to art. His theory and great enthusiasm about the digital medium is refreshing. Furthermore I like his ideas about appropriation. We rarely do anything original. Even when I compare it to the field of design, I think that he is right when he says that everything is somehow a remix of what already existing. Nevertheless, his view often seems kind of radical, ignoring the complexity of copyright and legal issues. Moreover the book does not make it clear how creativity is defined. At some points Goldsmith attaches the word »creative« to things one could also call a rational decision. In conclusion, in my opinion it's a great and profound reading to expand one's perspective on new techniques for writing and to give a new impulse for creating text in a digital world.



## Reading – Tash

The Electronic Revolution, by William Burroughs

### What is it saying (thesis)? (800)

The Electronic Revolution is an essay by William S. Burroughs, first published in 1970. It follows his experimental period of writing, in which he became fascinated by the 'cut-up' technique, and the subversive power of the written and recorded word. The piece is divided into two parts, and is written in a variety of styles, from the more formal and scientific, to streams of consciousness and even poetry.

Part one, entitled "The Feedback from Watergate to the Garden of Eden" introduces us to Burroughs' theory that the written word is, "literally a virus that made spoken word possible." He posits that the ability to write and convey information across generations is the distinguishing feature of human beings. It is the thing which separates us from other animals, and makes us into "time-binding machines". However, while other writers and scholars of grammatology often extol the virtues of the written word, Burroughs is suspicious, resistant. He sees human language, and especially the alphabetic, non-pictorial kind, as an "unrecognized virus" which has attained a "state of wholly benign equilibrium with its host."

Burroughs continues on to describe the 'word virus' through metaphors, and also literally as a biological mutation. He brings us into the realm of science by putting forward a theory that apes evolved into humans as a consequence of a virus which, when it didn't kill them, physically altered the shape of their throats and skulls. This alteration, he says, is what allowed the first humans to speak. Burroughs then makes comparisons and connections to the biblical Garden of Eden and man's original sin. For him, the 'unit of word and image' is as dangerous, and potentially fatal as Adam and Eve's forbidden fruit. Returning to the contemporary era, Burroughs warns: "So now with the tape recorders of Watergate and the fall out from atomic testing, the virus stirs uneasy in all your white throats."

The second part of the essay deals further with the idea of the human voice as a weapon, and the power of communications technologies to control man's thoughts and actions. It focuses on the potential uses of tape recording technology, and especially on the effect that playback has on the human psyche. "Some of the power in the word is released by simple playback, as anyone can verify who will take the time to experiment." Following his hypothesis that the word is a virus, then playback becomes a weapon of mass infection. He puts forward several examples of the volatile relationship between reality, recording and playback, including one about how to incite a riot in a crowd, using spliced up tapes of previous riots. Here he infers that there is a fundamental connection between human psychology and language technologies, and that the disease/control/breakdown of one is just as impactful on the other.

Following this, Burroughs' mistrust of mass media is one of the major themes of this text. Referring to The Invisible Generation, an earlier piece of writing in which he uses his famous 'cut-up' method, he talks about the "potential of thousands of people with recorders, portable and stationary, messages passed along like signal drums, of the President's speech up and down the balconies, in and out open windows, through walls..." His tone is conspiratorial and



energetic as he continues to stress the political function of recorded messages. "You can cut the mutter line of mass media and put the altered mutter line out in the streets with a tape recorder."

Moving on from cut-ups, Burroughs starts to talk about voice and video scramblings. He compares scrambles to viruses, demonstrates through a series of wildly interjecting pieces of text, and contemplates their uses. Though his examples are often about creating fear and anxiety, he also wonders if these techniques could be used for good. "Is it possible to create a virus which will communicate calm and sweet reasonableness?"

The piece ends with a suggestion for resisting the potential dangers of the 'word virus'. Burroughs wants to change the system at its root, proposing a new way of writing language, and therefore also the thinking and speaking of it: "A far-reaching biologic weapon can be forged from a new language... The aim of this project is to build up a language in which certain falsifications inherent in all existing western languages will be made incapable of formulation."

### What is its conclusion? (100)

William Burroughs' basic theory that alphabets and languages contain a 'virus', leads him to devise a series of experiments, in an attempt to hack or even replicate the virus. In this way, his famous cut-up method is not just about formal or creative investigation, it is a means of subverting language, which he sees as an anonymous force of social control. The essay argues that we must not take the written word for granted – not its origins, nor its consequences. Ultimately, this piece is a call to action, to be more critical of mass media and how language can be used to influence and create events (real or imaginary).

### What is your opinion? (100)

Burroughs erratic writing style is sometimes difficult to follow. But I find his unique point of view refreshing. Unlike Otto Neurath, for example, who sees language and the written word as a system of order and democracy, Burroughs stance is much more dystopian. He seems to be fascinated by the entropy of information, and obsessed by how to subvert and resist the 'negentropy' that Norbert Wiener posited. His distrust of language technologies is interesting. I would love to research how the current field of cybernetics deals with power and politics. What are the inherent biases in the English language? In other languages? In software? How can a book scanner reveal some of these inner workings, or subvert them? What other fields of 'language subversion' are there? Steganography?

## Reading – Zalán

The Medium is the Message, by Marshall McLuhan

### What is it saying (thesis)? (800)

In 1964 published book Understanding Media Marshall McLuhan states that the 'Media is the message' What

I will elaborate more on this questions and make a



means? How does it affects us in the age of mass communication and internet? In the following synopsis I will elaborate more on this questions and make a bridge with current social media behaviours on common platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp.

'This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves...' (McLuhan, 1964, p.7)

New technologies and automation has both effects on humankind, such as in positive way stating McLuhan (1964, p.7) 'a depth of involvement in their work and human associations that our preceding mechanical technology had destroyed.' In contrary with this new technology 'new patterns of human association tend to eliminate jobs' argues the author. (McLuhan, 1964, p.7) The mediums have more important impacts on the fundamental shape of the society, than any message, that is delivered through that medium.

Taking the electric light as the first example and stating, that this is pure information—a medium without message. (McLuhan, 1964, p.8) While looking to activities such as brain surgery and night baseball these activities became in some way the "content" of the electric light, since it would it be impossible without it. Day and night activities were reconstructed by the electric light. We can argue that the electric light can not be categorised as communication medium, because it has no "content". This lasted till electric light started to be associated with brand names, which established as a medium. It's message communicated the message of electric power in industry, totally radical, pervasive and decentralised. The uses of electric light and power are separate, but they eliminate time and space elements in human associations creating involvement in depth.

If we take, that the content of writing is speech, it is important to add, that it is a nonverbal process of thought. McLuhan argues, that 'characteristic of all media, mean that the "content" of any medium is always another medium.' (1964, p.8)

The cities, work, leisure and transportation were totally reshaped by the introduction of the railway. Since the Industrial Revolution it became a very important medium, and modifying the way, how we commute in our everyday life. On the other hand the airplane and car influenced the railway form of the city, politics, and association to dissolve. Recreating new mobility mediums in the urban and rural environments.

Taking the radio, telephone and the television as an other example, it is essential to underline, how those mediums transformed our division of time and changed totally our daily habits.

Looking to the field of cinematography the author formulates that 'mechanisation was never so vividly fragmented or sequential as in the birth of the movies, the moment that translated us beyond mechanism into the world of growth and organic interrelation.' (1964, p.12) It becomes a creative configuration and structure through sheer speeding up the mechanical world of sequences and connections. McLuhan quotes a statement about the moment as cubism in movie arrived by E. H. Gombrich (Art and Illusion) as 'the most radical attempt to stamp out ambiguity and to enforce one reading of the picture—that of a manmade construction, a collared canvas.' Cubism creates a perspective illusion, an interplay between dimensions and textures that "drives home the message" by involvement. Through the enormous development of the technology the understanding of art changed as well. The observers were able to understand the totality of a cubism art works, which leads to the statement the medium is the message. Before this time, the message was the "content", as visitors used to ask the meaning of the artwork.

Moving from cubism to nineteenth century Alexis de Tocqueville, a master of his time in grammar of print and typography. He had the ability to read off the message of coming change in France and America as if he were reading aloud from a text that had been handed to him. Knowing as well when the grammar did not apply. De Tocqueville really admired and knew England, so he got asked to write a book on England. His answer was 'One would have to have an usual degree of philosophical folly to believe oneself able to judge England in six months. A year always seemed to me too short time in which to appreciate the United States properly, and it is much easier to acquire clear and precise notions about the American Union than about Great Britain. In



America all laws derive in a sense from the same line of thought. The whole of society, so to speak, is founded upon a single fact; everything springs from a simple principle. One could compare America to a forest pierced by a multitude of straight roads all converging on the same point. One has only to find the centre and everything is revealed at a glance. But in England the paths run criss-cross, and it is only by travelling down each one of them that one can build up a picture of the whole.' De Tocqueville understood the contrast of the print culture in England and America and argued that, the most important event in English history has never taken place; namely the English Revolution.

### What is its conclusion? (100)

Concluding the essay 'Media is the message' McLuhan's idea was far ahead his time. His statement is possible to apply from electric light through cubism till social media of our time. Underlining one of his important sentences: 'Many people would be disposed to say that it was not the machine, but what one did with the machine, that was its meaning or message.' (McLuhan, 1964, p.7) He understood the binary relations of global village popularised in his books *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962) and *Understanding Media* (1964). McLuhan described how the organism are organised in the ecosystem and how everything is connected to each other.

### What is your opinion? (100)

In my opinion his statement is applicable of analysing the internet and the social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. Those reshaped the personal habits and rituals of social gatherings. Status updates, comments, followers, locations, likes, dislikes and emojis take more importance of our life. Hashtag quotes influence our communication methods on mediums such as Instagram and Facebook. Being offline becomes almost impossible nowadays, although this seemed as an utopian dream from a cyber movie a few years ago. The internet becomes an extension of our real truth by finding out, what we like and teleporting us into a realm of hyperreality.

## Reading- Angeliki

### "Six selection by the 'Oulipo'" in New Media Reader

#### Thesis of the text

The text is a selection of six writings by the 'Oulipo'. Some of them are descriptions and some other examples of the methods and purpose of the 'Oulipo' meetings. The oulipian writers were exploring potential literature by analyzing and synthesizing constraints. Some of their techniques were connected to algorithmic methods and other systems, related to phonetics or the alphabet. They were aiming to discover new tools that would enhance the involvement of the reader in the literary creation with the aid of the computer.

The first text by Raymond Queneau furnishes the reader with the possibility to combine different sentences in the creation of multiple poems, called as



sonnets. His method is based on the materiality of the text; Cutting the paper into lines containing each sentence, a ventalia is created in which you choose which sentence will be combined with another one. The second tale of the same writer provides a numeric order of the storyline. Every number contains parts and alternatives of the story. The reader selects between two numbers every time that hide the next part of the story. The parts are intervening like footnotes into the next texts of the other oulipians.

Subsequently, Jean Lescure in his text refers to a brief history of the Oulipo. He talks about how the group first met at a conference, related to the College of Pataphysics, and that the initial goal was not about composing poems. The name of the group was quite an issue for them, as they wanted to inspire themselves and differ from past writers, to be experimental and open to potentials. The name Oulipo that prevailed, is about a workshop for potential literature. They claimed that the source of inspiration should be a series of constraints and structures, opposed to subjectivity. Thus, literature can be explored like other sciences, such as mathematics. One of their first exploration was about language and its origin meaning, as an abstract and concrete object. As an example the writer refers the language of Chinook, in which the subject is an abstract word and not a specific noun. Then he talks about its connection with literature. In the language many potential interpretations and meanings can exist not even conceived by the writer. Oulipians wanted to find out these potentials. One of their main concerns was to provide tools and relevant examples for the future writers beyond their affectivity. And this is why they divided their process in analytic and synthetic. At last, obstacles could be dealt as a tool of creation of a new and combinatory literature.

At the next text, Claude Berge presents the potentials of a combinatory literature. According to him the idea of combinations was already present in mathematics, plastic arts and other fields, but not in literature, where it was introduced in 1961. To define further this term in writing, he talks about configurations and constraints. He is giving several examples among types of linguistic constraints, like alphabetical, phonetic, syntactic, numerical and semantic. The transposition of concepts is the core of combinatory literature and one example of it is the factorial poetry, where some elements of the text can be altered. To achieve these results they used equations and present the sonnets in graphs. But, in order to involve the writer and the reader in a more interesting process they decided to create graphs without circuits, where the end of the story was determined in advance. Some of the poems, ask for the readers' participation, and were inspired by the instructions given to computers. Another form of literature is the episodic story, relative stories are embed as parentheses on the base of a mathematical theory. At the end he gives an example of Latin bi-square, in which each character on the story acquires its behaviour of a table of numbers and letters where provide the choice of unlimited combinations.

Paul Fournel in the fifth text specifies further the involvement of computer in literary creation. He divides the processes in the Aided Reading and the Aided Creation. The first one refers to the combinatory and the algorithmic literature. In the former the computer provides to the reader and execute combinations of a definite amount of tales. The latter asks from the reader with double questions what is the next part of the story. In the Aided Creation defines three types of relation between the author, the writer, the work and the computer. In the first type the writer decides for the story with the help of the machine. In the second one the reader should use the machine to solve enigmas and take clues of the tale, created from the first type. In the last type of creation the reader chooses with the machine which attributes the story wishes to have, like the length or the theme, among stories already created in the computer.

In relation to these mechanistic processes, that produce multiple and unlimited combinations of stories, Italo Calvino introduces the antocombinatorics. The idea of it is that the computer connects all the possible knots but with certain constraints. He talks specifically for the detective mystery genre, where the character can be followed by a number of possible actions, but the writer eliminates them by setting more realistic parameters. For example, one character cannot be killed twice, if there are several actions of killing. He gives three examples of structures based on the types of constraints. The objective constraints aid to a logical order of sequences, in which an element doesn't recant another another important one. The subjective constraints provides other ulterior combinations and changes of the attributes of the character. The esthetic constraints make sure that the story follows a logical and psychological accepted flow. Finally, he claims that the aid of the computer doesn't mean that replaces the creativity of the author but liberates himself from the shackles of the a combinatory search.



## Conclusion

The core of the intention of the Oulipians was to differ from their romantic and arbitrary inspired ancestors. By appropriating methods from scientific fields and use them in the literary creation they aimed to furnish the upcoming generations with new intelligent tools, opposed to their affectivity. The conclusion is that the 'clinamen' or the error in the system, is actually what makes an action a work of art. The computer only helps the creator to eliminate fast the compinatory possibilities on the level of the desired outcome.

## Opinion

My opinion is that the idea of constraints of the Oulipo movement defined and structured strictly also the character and the complexity of the group. Like the computer did at that time, the distance they kept from their contemporary political, physical, cultural and social sphere excluded other possibilities and potentials of the movement. The writers of these texts often refer with articles to male audience. It is my belief that today the decentralized concept of connecting different layers of our perception above the world and ourselves can provide more interesting and complex systems of creation, either in literature or other form of art. Finally, the appropriation of methods and previous work of art is a question that should arise in the creative act.

Katalin Ladik, "Phonopoetica" ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=7&v=dvemhkCXSH8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=7&v=dvemhkCXSH8))

Douglas Huebler, "Variables", etc. ([https://monoskop.org/images/5/59/Huebler\\_Douglas\\_Variable\\_etc\\_1993.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/5/59/Huebler_Douglas_Variable_etc_1993.pdf))

## Reading - Joca

### iSpace: Printed English after Joyce, Shannon and Derrida, by Lydia H. Liu

What is the function of the phonetic alphabet and alphabetical writing in the current age? In this article Lydia H. Liu explores literature and technoscience to offer an understanding about the universal English alphabet since the development of information theory.

As the starting point she takes the work *Finnegans Wake* (FW) by James Joyce. In the book Joyce experiments with the English language using outrageous letter sequences and signs. He also introduces iSpace, which marks the space between the words in the text.

**Joyce as a writing machine** Liu calls Joyce a modernist engineer of cyberspace and states that his use of the alphabet in FW had implications for the use of the alphabet in computer technology that was developed after the publication of FW in 1939. She supports that statement by discussing a variety of writers that were inspired by his work.



One of them is Jacques Derrida, who used the concept of archi-writing to argue that language already has a semi-fixed structure by itself, already before we use it in writing and speaking. The writing then can be done by a hypermnestic machine that can anticipate all what is possible to say. Derrida calls Joyce the ultimate version of such a writing machine.

To get an idea of Joyce's view on this, Liu refers to Donald F. Theall. He argued that James Joyce approached writing as a piece of engineering, bringing statistical properties of letter sequences and spaces among words and non-words to light.

In the use of the alphabet, Liu states that in FW Joyce doesn't use the alphabet to document certain phonemes, but as a way to create ideograms: writing that besides letters includes other graphic marks to document a certain thought that is open to construction by the reader. One of the examples is an unpronounceable sequence of 100 letters in FW that instead of representing a phoneme, visualizes the fall of a character.

**From literature to information science** The work of Joyce also inspired scholars working in information science. C.K. Ogden was an admirer of Joyce and compared in his introduction of BASIC English the 850 word sized vocabulary of his language to the ultimate vocabulary of Joyce, which Ogden estimated to be more than 250.000 words.

\* Shannon, the creator of information theory, uses BASIC English and Finnegans Wake to illustrate the concept of redundancy. Joyce's writing is an example of low redundancy, while the limited vocabulary of BASIC often leads to expansion of the text and a high redundancy.

To do his research on the stochastic structure of language, Shannon approached English as a statistical system instead of a language. He called this system Printed English: an alphabet that is post-phonetic and features a 27th letter that marks the space.

Shannon used Printed English to find the statistical structure of the English language, generating random sequences of letters that look familiar to Joyce's in FW. He understood Printed English as an ideographic alphabet, in which the sequence of letters was influenced by probability. The space as the 27th symbol was especially useful for that, because the predictability of the English language is more dependent on the space than on any other letter.

In the end Liu concludes that natural language presumes a separation between speech and writing which is not relevant for computers that use the alphabet for a different purpose, namely a symbolic use of the alphabet to do computations. Printed English is especially suitable for this purpose because of its well-known statistic properties in comparison to other writing systems. The road towards this is the outcome of crossbreeding the ideas in the literary world and scientific experiments.

I find it interesting how Liu shows the connections between literature and technoscience in the development of an alphabet that was not based on phonetics or semantics, but one that has a symbolic meaning. Her writing style is dense, with many references to other authors. On one hand this gives an overview of the field, on the other hand it complicated my understanding of the reading of the article because I didn't know certain concepts Liu was referring to.

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— MEDIA

----- OULIPO

~~~~~ APPROPRIATION

— MATERIALITY

— Structuralism

— cybernetics

--- constraints

— orality + spoken word

WV Literacy

~~~~~ WRITING MACHINE

— inspiration

~~~~~ ALPHABET

--- POLITICAL